

AFRICA: A TOP POLICY PRIORITY IN THE NEW BUSH STRATEGY PLAN

By James Fisher-Thompson

*Washington File Staff Writer, Office of African Affairs,
Office of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State*



According to President Bush's new National Security Strategy, "Africa is important to peace and security worldwide and will receive all necessary help from the United States aimed at furthering its overall political and economic development," says James Fisher-Thompson, a Washington File Staff Writer in the Office of African Affairs. Fisher-Thompson interviewed a series of current and former U.S. government officials and prominent American scholars specializing in African affairs on what the security strategy plan has to say about U.S. policy toward Africa.

U.S. officials as well as several noted Africanists, in separate conversations recently, agreed that President Bush's new national security plan is clear evidence that a stable and democratic Africa remains a priority goal of the U.S. government. According to "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," a plan of action issued by the White House on September 20, Africa is important to peace and security worldwide and will receive all necessary help from the United States aimed at furthering its overall political and economic development.

The top Africa policy-maker at the State Department, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Walter Kansteiner, made that point at a talk he gave on conflict resolution at the Heritage Foundation in November 2002. "Africa is of great importance to this Administration, I'm pleased to say, and I think [this is] reflected in the President's National Security report." Looking toward the future, he added, "I think Africa is going to continue to play an important role in our national interests ... becoming much more viable to the United States" over time.

Brett Schaefer, Africa specialist at the Heritage Foundation, was not surprised at Africa's place in the strategy plan. "I think the president has actually put quite an emphasis on Africa over the past year or so," he said. "Then-Secretary [of the Treasury] Paul O'Neill went over there for an extended trip; Bush

announced the Millennium Challenge Account [50 percent of which will go to Africa] and he announced the HIV/AIDS and water initiatives, both of which are targeted at Africa. So it was natural that Africa got the mention it did in the security paper.

"From a national security standpoint, the administration's recommendations are quite consistent," Schaefer added. "They are trying to focus on reducing conflict and instability within Africa, which is a large priority. And they want to work with their European allies to achieve those objectives, especially if there is a need for peace operations."

On the latter point, Schaefer said, "Africa, as important as it is, obviously is not a place where America would seek to station vast amounts of troops. So the administration is trying to multiply its impact by working with other nations such as the regional powers it mentions in the strategy."

In contrast, Steve Morrison, director of Africa programs at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said the plan's emphasis on Africa is "pretty dramatic on several levels. First of all, at a conceptual level, it is a departure from business as usual because the new terrorism prevention strategy says: 'Broken, chaotic places that we thought were marginal before are in fact now a priority because they are places that could provide venues for the

shadow networks of terror.” Second, “the explicit mention and designation of Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Nigeria as key partners” is unique for such a policy document. And third, “the assertion that we would work very aggressively, with those four and others, within sub-regional settings to manage crises” is new.

Bush’s strategy plan “elevates the possible levels of achievement and lays out a much more ambitious range of diplomatic and political instruments America is now prepared to use to help Africans” to combat scourges like corruption, political instability, terrorism, and disease, he explained.

Chairman of the House Africa Subcommittee, Representative Ed Royce (Republican of California), commented on the plan’s importance saying, “I am pleased that the Bush Administration has articulated the critical importance of Africa to U.S. interests in its National Security Strategy. It is very important that we build strategic relationships with countries and regional organizations in Africa for our mutual security.”

On the economic level, the lawmaker added, “President Bush and I are united in our belief that one way to significantly increase political and economic freedom on the continent is through U.S. trade and investment.”

With the war on terrorism the U.S. government’s chief foreign policy priority, the Bush strategy paper emphasized that America can never be secure while economic hardship and political unrest abound. In a preface to the plan, President Bush said, “Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.”

According to the plan, in Africa “promise and opportunity sit side by side with disease, war, and desperate poverty. This threatens both a core value of the United States — preserving human dignity — and our strategic priority — combating global terror.” Therefore, it says, the U.S. government “will work with others for an African continent that lives in liberty, peace, and growing prosperity.”

The section of the Bush strategy plan entitled “Work With Others to Defuse Regional Conflicts” cites three key “interlocking strategies” for U.S. policymakers:

- working with countries “with major impact on their neighborhoods, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia;
- coordinating with European allies and international institutions, which is “essential for constructive conflict mediation and successful peace operations”; and
- aiding Africa’s “capable reforming states and subregional organizations,” which “must be strengthened as the primary means to address transnational threats on a sustained basis.”

For former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen, the focus on Africa in the national strategy paper is “a pleasing development, but not a great surprise.” He said, “It’s good that he [Bush] stressed the development aspect because Africans are making serious attempts to reform, although Africa is not a source of terrorism like other regions of the world.”

Cohen, a former U.S. Ambassador to Senegal who now runs his own international consulting firm, said, “Africa suffered terrorist attacks [on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998], but these came from outside” the continent. “I can’t think of a single instance where there was an anti-American terrorist attack coming from Africa itself. And there were no Africans in these groups — al Qaeda or what have you — even though 50 percent of Africans are Muslims — and devout Muslims at that.”

Cohen said that “African nations are cooperating with U.S. authorities on the war on terrorism and are making the kinds of political and economic reforms that attract investors. So it’s only natural that this administration sees Africa as worthy of the type of development assistance that enhances trade and investment.”

Royce said, “By trading more with African countries, we increase the capacity of those governments and the standard of living of Africans, cooperatively

building a stronger state in which people can exercise their freedoms and terrorists cannot so easily thrive. It is noteworthy that trade with the continent increased last year, while trade with other continents either stagnated or declined.”

He added, “Aside from working with Congress on extending the benefits of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the Bush Administration is also in the process of developing free trade agreements with Morocco and the countries of the Southern Africa Customs Union.” President Bush signed into law last August an amended version of the trade bill called AGOA II, which extends favorable trade benefits even further for more than 35 eligible nations in sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition to the points raised by Royce, the national security strategy outlines U.S. government assistance to the continent that includes:

- Ensuring that World Trade Organization (WTO) intellectual property rules are “flexible enough to allow developing nations to gain access to critical medicines for extraordinary dangers like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria”;
- Stepping up development assistance in the form of the new multi-billion-dollar Millennium Challenge Account, 50 percent of which will go to eligible African nations that President Bush said “govern justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom”; and
- Proposing an 18 percent increase in U.S. contributions to the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank’s fund for poor countries, and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

“It’s a complicated business to get involved in African affairs, but the continent does need institutional development for cooperation and the United States can help” by working with foreign allies as well as regional organizations on the continent, said I. William Zartman, the director of the Conflict Management Program at The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and former director of its African Studies department.

He said the security plan’s focus on coordinating with “European allies” is “absolutely on target, especially concerning the French.”

“It is time we worked with France to get over their part and our part of the ‘Fashoda complex,’ where they see any American activity or presence in Africa as an attempt to kick them out and where we see the French as leftover colonialists. We have got to discontinue this spitting war that has hurt us too much,” Zartman declared.

On the report’s call to strengthen “Africa’s capable reforming states and subregional organizations,” the SAIS scholar said, “I think the most important reform proposed for Africa over the last decade was the CSSDCA, or the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa, otherwise known as ‘the Kampala Document.’ It was the most important blueprint for change on the continent and deserves our support.”

Zartman recently co-authored a book on the subject with fellow Africanist Francis Deng, called “Strategic Vision for Africa.” While CSSDCA has become somewhat fragmented, he said, a part of its “spirit” — the idea that intervention by a group of states into the affairs of another state can be justified because of gross humanitarian violations — has been taken up by the new African Union (AU), the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

This came about, the scholar explained, because CSSDA was modeled after the 1975 Helsinki Accords, whose emphasis on human rights eventually contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union. Like Helsinki’s “baskets” of issues, CSSDA has a number of “calabashes,” he explained, adding, “Interestingly, the development calabash seems to be pretty much replicated in NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa’s Development].”

NEPAD is a socio-economic framework for development formulated by leaders on the continent like South Africa’s President Thabo M’beki and now endorsed by the African Union (AU). Unique among similar African roadmaps for development, NEPAD includes a “peer review mechanism” that encourages political reform and transparency for eligible African nations.

The White House security plan singled out the AU for mention, saying, “The transition to the African Union with its stated commitment to good governance and a common responsibility for democratic political systems offers opportunities to strengthen democracy on the continent.”

This “is an appropriate move,” said former assistant secretary Cohen, because, “the AU, as well as grassroots efforts like NEPAD, are making a genuine attempt to understand why African development has been lagging. They have discovered that that includes bad economic policies that have to be reformed and also that good governance and democracy have been lagging, which are needed to encourage investments.”

The brainchild of leaders like Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and South African President Thabo Mbeki, NEPAD is as much a guide for development on the continent as it is a plan of action. Assistant Secretary Walter Kansteiner recently praised the program saying, “At the core of NEPAD’s theology ... is a notion that good governance is not only expected, but good governance is going to be required.”

Kansteiner said, “That’s a different perspective than what we’ve seen in the past, and we think it’s an important one — we embrace it fully.”

Cohen called NEPAD “very encouraging because it is not just the U.S. telling them what to do, but it is the Africans themselves recognizing that they have a problem and moving to correct it.”

With that in mind, the security plan’s focus on AGOA was also a good move, Cohen said, because “if you look at some of the trade statistics since AGOA started [two years ago], the countries that are doing best in terms of economic growth are the ones

benefiting from AGOA. For example, South Africa is exporting BMW cars [to the U.S. market].”

This means that “a lot of South African workers and their families are doing better now because of AGOA,” Cohen said. And, he added, “I personally believe that is what Africa needs — more revenue from trade so that wealth can be created for governments to provide more social services and infrastructure like clean water and electricity.”

Heritage’s Schaefer agreed with Cohen on the benefits of AGOA, noting, “All in all, the trade act has been a very large success for the continent as far as exports are concerned.” The Africanist disagreed, however, on the importance of the newly formed AU. “I’m a little skeptical of the AU,” he said. “It seems to be a repackaging of the old organization in new paper.”

He added: “The promises sound great, but it [AU] has been reluctant to chastise one of the most horrific abusers of his own people on the continent — [Zimbabwe’s President] Robert Mugabe. This lapse seems to be a bright neon arrow pointing to the weakness of the organization, and that is [the fact that] African nations seem to be very reluctant to chastise each other.”

In order to keep Africa from being bypassed or “marginalized” in the new global economy — an important requisite to political well being and security, policymakers say — the U.S. Government has put its money where its mouth is. In 2001 alone, it contributed more than \$1,100 million to development programs and humanitarian assistance in sub-Saharan Africa. It is the single largest donor to HIV/AIDS programs on the continent as well as the single largest contributor to assistance programs in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Somalia. ●